

## AEDC 2021: Key Findings

**This fact sheet provides an overview of the national results from the 2021 data collection in comparison with the four previous collections (2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018)**

### About the census

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a nationwide measure that looks at how young children have developed by the time they start their first year of full-time school. It measures five important areas, or domains, of early childhood development that are closely linked to the predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes.

The five domains<sup>1</sup> are:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- Communication skills and general knowledge

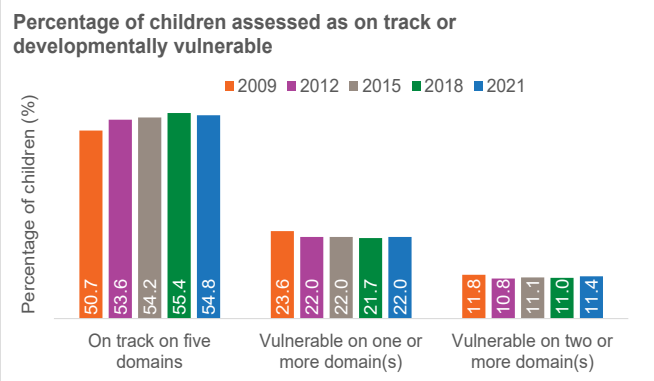
The AEDC provides evidence to support policy, planning and action for health, education and community support. It demonstrates what is working well and where more work is needed to ensure all children can have the benefits of a strong start in life.

Around 300,000 children have been included in each collection of the AEDC, totalling around 1.5 million children. With this many children included, the changes over time can appear to be small, but they are significant.

### Summary Indicators

The 2021 AEDC data provides an early insight into how young children have fared through the COVID-19 pandemic, noting many children have had reduced access to early learning through preschools and child care, as well as increased family stress. Overall, COVID-19 does not appear to have had a substantial negative impact as may have been expected.

The 2021 AEDC data shows a small but significant increase in the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable and a reduction in children who are on track, slightly reversing some of the positive trends seen since 2009.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aedc.gov.au/about-the-aedc/about-the-aedc-domains>

## AEDC Domains

### Physical health and wellbeing

In the physical health and wellbeing domain there was a small increase in the percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable; from 9.6 per cent in 2018 to 9.8 per cent in 2021.

### Social competence

The social competence domain was the only domain where the level of vulnerability decreased; from 9.8 per cent in 2018 to 9.6 per cent in 2021.

### Emotional maturity

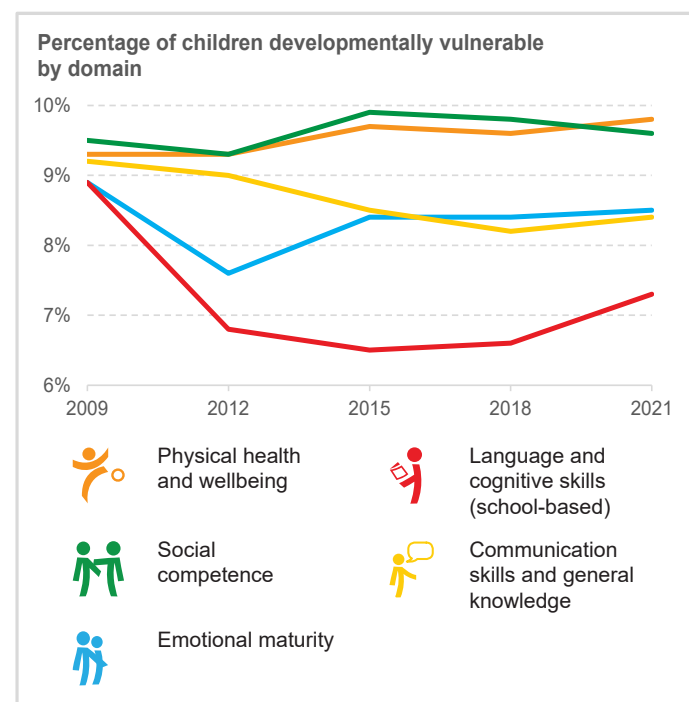
The emotional maturity domain saw a slight increase in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable; from 8.4 per cent in 2018 to 8.5 per cent in 2021.

### Language and cognitive skills

The language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain saw the most significant shift in 2021. The percentage of children who were developmentally vulnerable on this domain increased from 6.6 per cent in 2018 to 7.3 per cent in 2021.

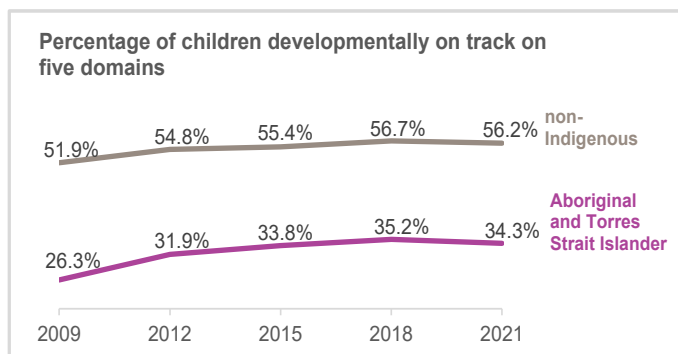
### Communication skills and general knowledge

The progressive gains made on the communication skills and general knowledge domain since 2009 have not continued in 2021, with results at a similar level to 2015. The percentage of vulnerable children increased from 8.2 per cent in 2018 to 8.4 per cent in 2021.



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children developmentally on track on five domains in 2021 decreased from 35.2 per cent to 34.3 per cent, widening the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children to 21.9 percentage points. This is the first decrease since 2009.



## Children living in socio-economically disadvantaged communities

In 2021, the percentage of children on track on all five domains decreased across all SEIFA quintiles<sup>2</sup>. The gap between children in the most disadvantaged and least disadvantaged locations, however, widened to 20.7 percentage points, the largest gap since 2012 (22.4 percentage points).

## Language diversity

The gap between Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) children and English only children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) and two or more domains has steadily narrowed since 2009. In 2021, 25.3 per cent of LBOTE children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) in comparison with 20.8 per cent of children with an English only background.

Find out more

For more information about the AEDC, visit [www.aedc.gov.au](http://www.aedc.gov.au)

<sup>2</sup> The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) was developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to rank geographical areas in Australia according to their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.